

Town of Acton  
Report of the Cemetery Commissioners  
November 2, 2009

The current commissioners are Brewster Conant and Bill Klauer. Les Gerhardt died earlier this year and the position remains vacant. At of this time, Barbara Walsh has attended several meetings and seems to understand the demands of the position and has family ties in Woodlawn.

Sean O'Malley is in charge of the day to day operations with Allura Overstreet the secretary for the Department, Both of them are very dedicated personnel, Sean continues a long tradition begun decades ago of keeping our three cemeteries in excellent condition. He is joined with three more personnel and some seasonal help in the summer, one full time position remains unfilled. Allura has incorporated all internments into a data base utilizing the department card file system. This includes all internments for each of the three cemeteries and it may be an item that can be accessible on line at some time in the future.

The Commissioners annually contribute a portion of the income from the Perpetual Care funds, during the past decade, we have seen the returns from these funds dwindle and currently we are in the position of funding about 25% of what we were capable of providing several years ago.

Our paved roads have been patched over time. The pavement has deteriorated from the effects of frost heaves and lifted from the roots of trees. These roads are typically one hundred years or older and funding is necessary to maintain the roads. The new sections of the cemeteries do not have trees adjacent to the roadway as was the custom years ago and the pavement is not subject to the perils of the older sections. Unfortunately the entrances to Woodlawn and Mount Hope are over early roads.

We have a section ready to be laid out in salable lots in Mt. Hope. We have been unable to proceed because of demands from the Recreation Department and being short a staff member for two years. We would be wise to begin the process of developing a new section at Woodlawn. We currently have about 7300 grave sites between our three cemeteries. Forest Cemetery does not have any available lots and the cemetery has expanded to the maximum size of the property, there have been no internments there during the past fifty years.

In addition to the three cemeteries, our personnel are responsible for the maintenance of the grounds around Woodlawn Memorial Chapel, the playing fields on Concord Road, the Morrison property, Hart and McPherson fields on Taylor Road, the Acton Arboretum, the playing fields on School Street, the fields on Great Hill, Jones' Field, Gardner Playground, the Elm Street field, Goward Playground, Veteran's field and N.A.R.A. Park as well as preparing the community gardens.

It is obvious that a fair amount of equipment is mandated to maintain this amount of property. Currently, our garage facility has overflowed to the extent that we receive comments and complaints about the outside storage of valuable and much used machinery some of which is exposed to the elements and deterring from the appearance of our facility. A sum of one hundred thousand was voted at Town meeting back in 1985 under Article 15 to construct a maintenance building and in 1998 Article 27 for an additional one hundred thousand. The need existed 25 years ago when the item was first proposed, during this time, the department has acquired much more territory to manage resulting in more equipment. While the Commissioners, Sean and Tom Tidman are searching for screening methods to separate the outdoor storage from the burial sites, the fact remains that the outside storage of equipment decreases its lifespan and time is wasted rejuvenating items that get vandalized or damaged from the weather.

The Acton Historical Commission is currently in the process of nominating the three cemeteries for the National Register of Historic Places. We have concerns that this could possibly mandate a level of care that we cannot afford if outside conservation is mandated as a result of this process. Perpetual care funding began about 110 years ago, therefore, we have about one half of Woodlawn and Mount Hope without any perpetual care. There are five lots in Forest Cemetery with perpetual care. For this reason, we are not self sufficient to cover our operating costs while maintaining these resting places.

We are pleased to learn that the Hearse House located on Concord Road and constructed about 1862 will receive some much needed repair. It serves to house some of the smaller hand operated equipment but the sliding doors have become inoperable so it has not been recently utilized.

The Commissioners meet the second Wednesday at 2 p.m. at the Kennedy Building in Woodlawn Cemetery. Under the present structure of the Town the Cemetery Department is part of the Conservation Department, headed by Tom Tidman. Tom typically meets with us to ensure that he is aware of our concerns. He has been most diligent and resourceful in facilitating our goals.

We hope that this brings to light some of the many issues we are faced with and we seek your assistance and input to begin to resolve some of our concerns.

Sincerely,

William A. Klauer  
Chairman